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ADDRESS

READ BY

JOHN CROPPER, A. M., LL.B.

President of the Society of the Cincinnati
In the State of Virginia

AT

YORKTOWN

BEFORE

The General Society of the Cincinnati

ON

11 MAY, 1905

UPON

The Siege of Yorktown

Printed by the General Society





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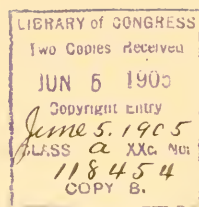
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We stand here among surroundings, however plain and unimportant they may appear today, that mark a theatre upon whose stage was enacted in 1781 scenes that, considering the causes and circumstances which led up to them and the results which ensued from them, produced one of the most picturesque and far-reaching events in the history not only of this country but of the whole world.

It is unnecessary to recall all that happened between 19th April, 1775, and 19th October, 1781; suffice it to say that the British forces and the British government having failed to crush the head of the dragon of rebellion, attempted to cut it in two by striking at the middle; and with this object in view began those operations in the South that culminated with the siege and capture of Charleston, from which point the Royal troops were to proceed Northward, occupying the country, and finally to possess and devastate the middle colony of Virginia; and thus destroy the base from which much food and many men were supplied to the Rebel armies. It is not needful for us to enumerate now the many gallant actions and stubborn resistance which blocked the course of the invaders through the Carolinas before they arrived within the borders of this Commonwealth, but we will begin with the operations of Lord Cornwallis therein.

Early in the year General de Lafayette had been sent with a small force to in some measure check the raids of Arnold and Tarleton; and in the first part of March arrived at Williamsburg to join General Muhlenberg, who was guarding the roads that led from Portsmouth, the British base. To blockade the Chesapeake there was sent at the same time from Newport a small French fleet, which was engaged and driven off by the British. Left without this support, Lafayette turned to join Washington in the North, but at the Head of Elk received dispatches directing him to return and become a part of General Greene's command. He passed through Baltimore on 19th April and was at Richmond on the 29th. Here he received orders from Greene to command the Continental troops in Virginia and to protect the State. He attempted to occupy Petersburg, but was too late; and at that place on the 20th May Cornwallis arrived; and then began that series of marches and counter-marches by which Lafayette showed such skill in keeping out of the enemy's way, until he had crossed the Rapidan and been reinforced by General Wayne, who came

down through Maryland. This enabled him to check Cornwallis to some extent, and the latter retired southward with the French boy hanging on his rear. No fighting took place till the 26th June, when there was a slight skirmish six miles above Williamsburg; and on the 6th July occurred the battle of Green Spring, which was brought on by Wayne supposing that most of the British force had crossed the James. This was not the case; but his gallantry saved his men, and although success was with the King's troops, they did not follow it up. Lafayette encamped at Malvern Hill the 20th July; and Cornwallis and Tarleton at Suffolk. In a short time the entire British army was at Portsmouth in preparation to embark for New York, but Cornwallis urged Sir Henry Clinton to allow him to retain the whole force; and, while Washington and Greene were speculating why these troops were being concentrated at Portsmouth, Cornwallis suddenly appeared at Yorktown, which place he was only to leave as a prisoner of war. How did he happen to go there? Clinton, when he determined to leave this army in Virginia, ordered Cornwallis to establish a naval station at Old Point Comfort and to protect it by fortifying Yorktown. His Lordship made a survey of the water at Old Point; but, determining that it was not advantageous for the establishment of such a station, proceeded up the York river as far as this, which he deemed the best place. He began fortifications here and at Gloucester Point, opposite, considering that he was carrying out the spirit of his instructions. In the bitter controversy which followed, as it always does when a campaign fails, Clinton said his instructions had not been obeyed, and Cornwallis the reverse.

We must now turn our thoughts to the North. General Washington was encamped on the Hudson and the Count de Rochambeau was at Newport. On the 22d May these two Generals, with Knox, Duportail and Chastellux, held a Council of War at Weathersfield, Connecticut, where it was determined that the French troops should form a junction with the Americans on the Hudson and attack Clinton at New York, which he held with a depleted force. This junction was accomplished at the beginning of July, and an attempt was made by General Lincoln and the Duke de Lauzun to surprise the enemy's outposts at King's Bridge. Their attempt failed; but it served notice on Sir Henry Clinton that he might be besieged; and he at once sent to withdraw the troops from Cornwallis in Virginia, which was the cause for the concentration

of them at Portsmouth. We have seen, however, that Cornwallis finally kept all his men and went to Yorktown.

Thus matters stood, Washington in front of Clinton in the North, Lafayette watching Cornwallis in the South, till the middle of August, when word came that the Count de Grasse with his powerful fleet was surely coming from the West Indies and purposed entering the Chesapeake. Washington had intended that the Count should come to New York; but, as that was not the case, his great genius showed itself in at once changing his point of attack from New York to Yorktown. He without delay ordered his army to cross the Hudson, and, leaving small forces at West Point, Saratoga, on the Mohawk and the Canadian frontier, began his great march through the Jerseys on his way to Virginia. Clinton thought this movement meant an attack on New York by way of Staten Island. He was not undeceived till New Brunswick had been reached; and it was not till Princeton had been passed that many of the higher officers of the French and Americans knew where they were going; so well had the secret been kept. Once their destination was known the men marched rapidly. On the 5th September Washington was at the Head of Elk, and on the day before had received from Baltimore positive assurance that de Grasse was in the Chesapeake. Cornwallis had remained in ignorance of Washington's movements; not so Lafayette, who recalled Wayne from the south bank of the James, and, coming down to meet him, formed a line across the peninsula at Williamsburg. Cornwallis, misinformed of de Grasse's coming, failed to attempt to break this line, trusting to the arrival of the British fleet from the West Indies, which he was expecting as Washington was that of the French. As a matter of fact, the British fleet did arrive first; but, not finding any enemy at the entrance of the bay, went on to New York, and when it returned de Grasse was established within the capes and had dispatched the troops from his fleet, under the Marquis de St. Simon, to Jamestown Island. On the 5th September, the day Washington reached the Head of Elk and St. Simon landed at Jamestown, the French Admiral stood out to sea and engaged the British fleet under Admirals Hood, Drake and Graves. After an action of less than two hours the enemy withdrew and de Grasse remained in possession of the Chesapeake. It was not till the 18th September that all of Washington's army had started down the bay, some directly from the Head of Elk and

others by way of Baltimore and Annapolis, whence they were taken by French frigates to landings on the James. On the 26th all the divisions were encamped; Washington's, the French and Lafayette's, in front of Williamsburg.

On the 28th the allied armies marched from Williamsburg in a single body; but about half way broke into separate columns, filing off, the French to the left, the Americans to right. Noon saw them within two miles of Yorktown. Resistance there was none, the British pickets falling back as their enemy appeared. That night the allies formed a line within a mile of the town, extending from the York River on their left to the Beaverdam on their right. Washington's order was "The whole army, officers and men, will lay on their arms this night."

Yorktown was not well situated for defense. It stands, as you see, on a bluff overlooking the river. Cornwallis encircled it with a line of ten redoubts, two of which, the famous 9 and 10, stood in advance and detached on his extreme left. He also placed a projecting redoubt called the Horn work, commanding the road to Hampton. These were the inner works. Above the town a ravine sets up from the river and runs round in front; and below the town is Wormsley's Creek. These two form a narrow neck of land, over which run the Williamsburg and Hampton roads. To make an outer line of defense Cornwallis threw up three redoubts, two by the Williamsburg road and the other at the Hampton. He also had some entrenchments at Moore's Mill and, on the extreme right, a star-shaped redoubt beyond the ravine, known as the Fusileers' Redoubt, being held by the Royal Welch Fusileers and protected by the war ship *Guadaloupe*. He had sixty-five pieces of artillery, none over eighteen pounders and some of these had been brought ashore from the war ship *Charon*.

The opposing armies were made up of English and Germans, French and Americans, nations always noted for their valor and bravery. They were the flower of both hosts and most of them veterans. We must admit, however, that there were in round numbers, sixteen thousand besiegers and seven thousand five hundred besieged. Time does not allow the enumeration of the regiments, their leaders and commanders.

On the 29th, the day after their arrival, the attacking armies spread out and established a permanent camp in the form of a semi-circle reaching from the river on the left to Wormsley's

Creek on the right. The next morning they awoke to a surprise, the enemy had abandoned the outer works and withdrawn to those next the town. Before noon Washington had occupied the abandoned redoubts, beginning at once to arrange them for his own use and to add others. In the course of four days he had converted what had been the enemy's outer line into his first fortified position. This was done under a severe fire from the British, but all worked with a good will, including the Commander-in-Chief, who allowed no detail to escape him, the siege guns being brought up from the James by means of his own baggage wagons and those of the higher officers.

But what of the other side of the river at Gloucester Point? General Weeden and the Duke de Lauzun had forces there, the latter reinforcing the former; and the whole under the command of General de Choisy. On the 3rd October Tarleton, who had crossed over the river, made a raid, the outcome of which was an engagement that resulted in General de Choisy encamping on the field, and thus blocking that avenue of escape, or rather communication with the outer world.

The advance on Yorktown was made by parallels. During the first week in October the soldiers were employed in making gabions, facines and stakes, and in bringing up all the guns, besides accomplishing the work on the redoubts occupied on the 30th September. The ground was carefully laid off by the engineers. The ravine above the upper part of the town prevented operations in that direction so that attack was directed on the lower part, on the enemy's left. The line extended from nearly opposite the British centre for two thousand yards to the river, and from six to eight hundred yards from the enemy, this latter distance being caused by the position of redoubts, Number 9 and Number 10, in advance of the other works.

By the evening of the 6th everything was in readiness and after dusk the troops paraded, the French on the left under Baron Viomenil and the Americans under General Lincoln, with Generals Wayne and Clinton as brigadiers, on the right. The men dug with a will and silently. For eight hours the work went on and at sunrise the British were surprised with a line of earthworks, running along their front. The Americans worked by detachments relieving detachments, digging, digging, digging, night and day until on the 9th October

enough batteries had been erected and sufficient strength given the works to open the bombardment of the town. At three in the afternoon the first shot was fired from the French battery on the extreme left, that had been erected opposite the Fusileers' redoubt, and so fierce was the cannonade the frigate *Guadaloupe* was obliged to retire to Gloucester Point out of reach of the guns. At five o'clock the Americans opened fire on the extreme right. The first shot is, on good authority, attributed to the Commander-in-Chief, and it is said to have been singularly fatal, falling among a group of British officers, killing many. Cornwallis had his headquarters in Secretary Nelson's house just out of the town, the handsomest residence there. During the violent bombardment, which continued all night, it was so riddled with shot that he abandoned it on the 10th, and it was reduced to ruins. On this same day two more batteries were opened. Lafayette invited Governor Nelson to be present because of his accurate knowledge of the place. "To what particular spot would your Excellency suggest that we point the cannon?" "There," replied the Governor, "to that house. It is mine and, now that the Secretary's is nearly knocked to pieces, is the best one in the town. There you will be almost certain to find Lord Cornwallis and the British headquarters. Fire upon it, my dear Marquis, and never spare a particle of my property so long as it affords a comfort or a shelter to the enemies of my country."

The bombardment was so effective that the ships of the English were obliged to withdraw, at least those that were not sunk. The *Charon* took fire from a hot shot on the 10th and was entirely consumed.

The 11th October saw fifty-two pieces of artillery* playing on the town, and the enemy's batteries nearly silenced.

That night the second parallel was begun and by morning there had been thrown up an entrenchment seven hundred and fifty yards long, three and one-half feet deep and seven feet wide; but to complete the line redoubts 9 and 10 must be possessed. It was determined to assault them. The night of the 14th was chosen for the attack. Number 9 was assigned to the French; Number 10 to the Americans.

The French were led by Colonel Count William de Deuxpont and Lieutenant-Colonel Baron de l'Estrade. At eight

*One of these pieces of artillery was after the siege presented by General Lafayette to Lieutenant-Colonel Cropper, grandfather of the author, and it is now in his possession.

o'clock the signal, six shells fired in rapid succession, was given and the party moved forward, but the Hessian sentry discovered them, and fire was at once opened. A strong abatis stopped them for a few moments and some of the men fell. A passage was soon opened, however, the Chasseurs dashed on and were quickly upon the parapet. The first was the Chevalier de Lameth, who fell shot through both knees. Colonel Deuxpont slipped and falling was dragged up by Lieutenant de Sillegue, who was mortally wounded in doing it. The enemy charged the French, but Deuxpont ordered his men to fire and countercharge; and they carried the works, the Hessians throwing down their arms. It took less than half an hour. The loss was fifteen killed and seventy-seven wounded.

The American battalions, to which was assigned the storming of Number 10, were Gimat's, Alexander Hamilton's, and half of Laurens'. Hamilton commanded; his own troops were led by Major Nicholas Fish. Lafayette had intended the command for Gimat, but Hamilton claimed it because he was Field Officer of the day. The decision was left to the Commander-in-Chief, who decided in Hamilton's favor. As the six shells were fired, Hamilton led his men rapidly forward, having first sent Laurens round to cut off the enemy's retreat in the rear. The troops marched quickly with unloaded muskets; and, without waiting for a way to be cut, they rushed over the obstructions and swarming up and over the parapet took the works in ten minutes.

Lieutenant John Mansfield, leader of the forlorn hope, was among the first to enter, and received a bayonet wound. Stephen Olney,* of Rhode Island, one of the oldest Captains in the service, was severely wounded in the arm and side. Gimat was wounded in the foot as the first obstruction was reached, and obliged to retire. Laurens discharged his duty so well that he captured Major Campbell, the British Commander. Every part of the movement was carried out as planned without the slightest hitch. The loss was nine killed and twenty-five wounded. Although Arnold's methods at New London were not forgotten, no brutality was indulged in.

*One of the first to enter the redoubt was Captain Olney, who sustained terrible bayonet wounds. One in the side of the abdomen was thought to be the worst. He recovered, however, from this and others, but the one in arm, at the time considered of no importance, in later life made the amputation of the whole arm necessary.

By morning the supports of the storming parties had converted these two redoubts into part of the second parallel.

Brilliant as all this was, the British were not silent or inactive; and on the next night, the 15th, made a sortie, by which they captured a French battery and an American one, spiking four guns in the former and three in the latter, but were driven back by the Viscount de Noailles. It was a brave but useless sortie, for in six hours the spiked cannon were playing on Yorktown.

Being by this time fully alive to his situation, Cornwallis, on the night of the 16th, began to transfer his troops to Gloucester Point, in the hope that, by forced marches, he might reach New York; but this was not to be. A violent storm came up at midnight, which made the passage of the river impossible, and those that had crossed in the earlier part of the evening were hurriedly brought back at dawn.

By ten o'clock in the morning of the 17th a drummer was seen to mount the British parapet and heard to beat a parley. By his side stood a British Officer with a white flag, the meaning of which could not be mistaken. This Officer was met by an American Officer, and, being blindfolded, conducted to the rear. Cornwallis asked for a cessation of hostilities for twenty-four hours and to have Commissioners appointed to prepare conditions of surrender. Washington's reply was, that he preferred to receive proposals from the British leader in writing, and would cease hostilities for two hours. This was acceded to. Among the proposals submitted was one, that the British Officers and men should be sent to England on parole not to fight against France or America till exchanged. This was inadmissible, and it was returned with an ultimatum from Washington, to whom every moment was precious, as he had good reason to fear the return of the English fleet to the bay and the breaking of de Grasse's blockade. Washington demanded, among other things, the surrender of Cornwallis on the same terms imposed on General Lincoln at Charleston, in 1780. Cornwallis yielded on the night of the 17th. The next day the Commissioners, Lieutenant-Colonel Dundas and Major Ross, on the part of the British, and the Viscount de Noailles and Lieutenant-Colonel Laurens for the Americans, met at the Moore House and drew up fourteen articles for the surrender of the garrison, including the ordnance, stores and loyalists.

Washington sent these to Cornwallis early on the 19th,

intimating that he sign them by eleven o'clock, and that by two the troops should march out and lay down their arms. Before eleven the articles were signed in the trenches.

By noon Colonel Marquis de Laval and Colonel Richard Butler took possession of two of the redoubts on the enemy's left.

At two the end came. The British, wearing new uniforms, marched out as if on parade, all but their colors, for these were cased. They were not allowed to play an American or French air. These were the counterpart of the conditions imposed on General Lincoln at Charleston. During the meeting of the Commissioners, when the articles were read, Major Ross, pointing to one of them, said to Laurens:

"This is a harsh article."

"Which article?" said the American.

"The troops shall march out, with colors cased and drums beating a British or a German march."

"Yes, sir; it is a harsh article," said Laurens.

"Then," said Ross, "if that is your opinion, why is it here?"

Laurens, who was one of the prisoners at Charleston, reminded Ross that, although the defense of Charleston had been gallant, the Americans were allowed no honors of surrender other than the above.

"But," replied the Britisher, "my Lord Cornwallis did not command at Charleston."

"There, sir," replied Laurens, "you extort another observation—it is not the individual that is here considered; it is the nation. This remains an article, or I cease to be a Commissioner."

There was nothing more to be said. The article stood. The colors were cased and the march played was "The World Turned Upside Down." Truly, a prophetic tune.

The prisoners, as they came along the Hampton road, found the victors drawn up in two lines, the French on the one side, the Americans on the other. It must have been a picturesque sight on that bright October day. The French, with their beautiful uniforms and gorgeous white and gold flags; and the Americans, in their varied and worn habiliments, that could scarcely be called clothes, much less uniforms, with their Commanders, Washington, Rochambeau, Lincoln, Lafayette, Steuben, Knox, and the rest, at the head of the lines. Between these marched the British, led by General O'Hara in place of Cornwallis, pleading illness and sending his sword by the for-

mer to be surrendered to Washington. Coming forward, he was referred to General Lincoln, who, receiving the sword as a sign of surrender, immediately returned it. The vanquished troops, passing between the two lines, laid down their arms in a field to the south of the town. This ceremony was done in a semi-circle formed by a regiment of French Hussars. The prisoners returned by the same route to their tents, where they rested a few days; and then the men and a number of the Officers were marched off to the prison camps at Winchester, Virginia, and Frederick, Maryland, under guard of the Militia. The Commander and his chief Officers were allowed to go to New York on parole. Both Washington and Rochambeau entertained them at their tables before their departure.

About the 1st November the American army began its return march to the Hudson; but the French remained in and around Yorktown for the winter, and in the spring returned to Newport, where they were quartered till their departure for the West Indies in 1782.

It is needless to say the delight expressed in the United States at the surrender was extreme; the news spread in all directions. Washington's aid, Lieutenant-Colonel Tilghman, who had been with him since the battle of Long Island, rode as fast as horse could take him to Philadelphia. At midnight on the 24th he aroused the President of Congress, Thomas McKean, and before morning the whole city knew. At two o'clock the next day Congress went in a body to hear a sermon in the Lutheran Church; and after that voted a resolution of thanks to the army and another to erect a monument at Yorktown. One hundred years later this noble shaft was completed. In the evening the City of Philadelphia was illuminated.

Across the sea, our generous ally, Louis XVI., ordered a *Te Deum* to be sung in Notre Dame on the 27th November; and the municipality of Paris directed all citizens to illuminate their houses. In England itself there was a party, who, if it did not rejoice, was not sorry.

Such is the Story of Yorktown. The Revolution practically ended here.

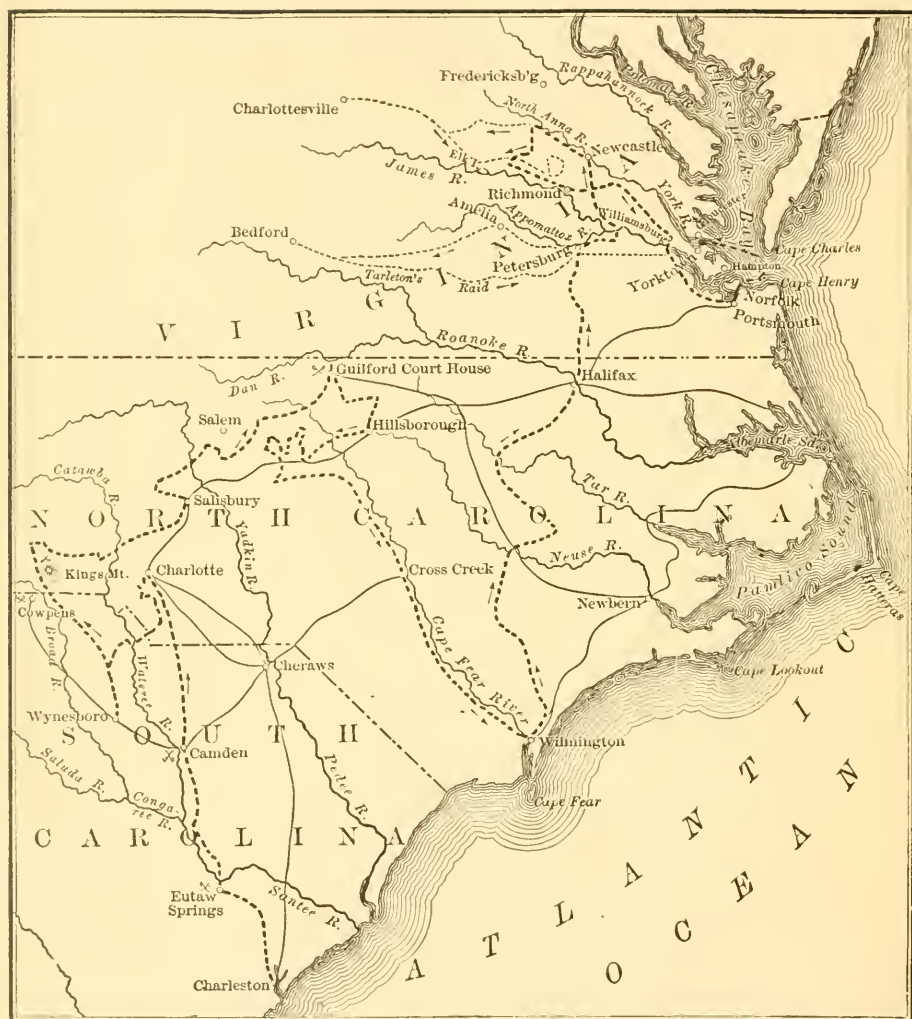
We Americans delight to think of Yorktown as our own. It is, but only in part. When one visits the Palace of Versailles, there one sees on its walls, among the victories of France, Yorktown. May it never be forgotten that it was an American victory fought by French men and a French victory fought by Americans on American soil.

M A P S

OF THE

Yorktown
Campaign





Map showing the route and operations of Cornwallis in the south (From Faden's Map, London, 1787)

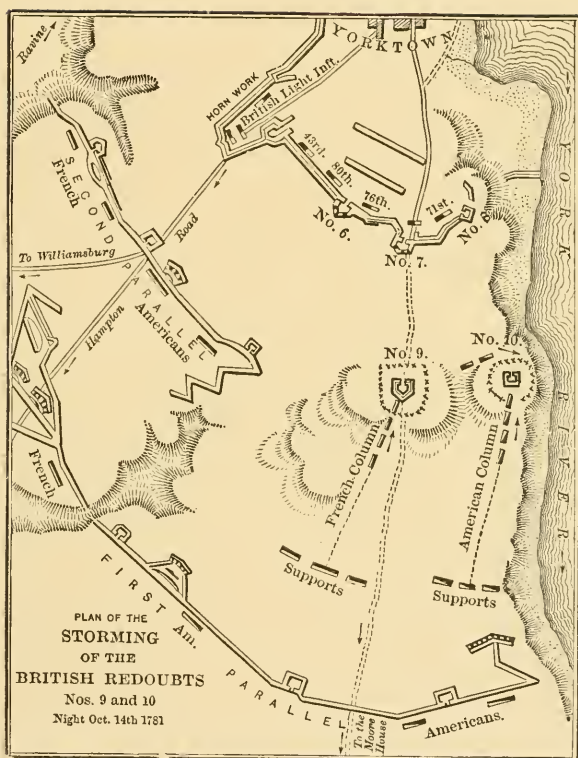


Route of Washington's Army from the
Hudson to Yorktown

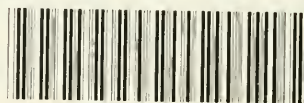


Plan of the Siege of Yorktown

References: A, Works at Cornwallis' outer position, evacuated night of September 29th.—B, B, First parallel.—C, American battery on extreme right, from which Washington fired the first shot.—D, Captain Machin's American battery.—E, American mortar battery.—F, French battery on extreme left, first to open fire October 9th.—G, G, French grand and mortar batteries.—H, Zigzag to second parallel.—I, M, Second parallel.—O, N, N, French batteries.—K, Redoubt stormed by Americans night of October 14th.—Q, Redoubt stormed by French.—P, P, French and American batteries attacked by enemy, night of October 15th.—S, British Fusileers' Redoubt.—T, Frigate Charon and transports on fire.—R, R, R, French ships approaching after the surrender.



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